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SUBJECT: SLOVENIA: DINNER WITH THE RUPELS: KOSOVO/SERBIA,
ITALY, HUMAN RIGHTS ET AL

REF: LJUBLJANA

Classified By: COM Thomas B. Robertson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶11. (C) Summary. At dinner with COM and wife January 17, FM Dmitrij Rupel reported briefly on his recent trip to Belgrade where he urged PM Kostunica to accept the inevitable on Kosovo. He said he expected the Italian-Slovenian relationship to improve over the next year, noting a discrete agreement recently concluded on the return of cultural artifacts to the original churches from which they had been taken. Rupel spoke with passion about the difficulty the GOS was having managing the "erased" issue, and he commented that there had been efforts within the police to cause a major incident over the Ambrus Roma case. He confirmed that the government's relationship with President Drnovsek has deteriorated substantially during the last year, and that Drnovsek even refuses to return his calls. End Summary.

On Message on Kosovo and Serbia, but Still Concerned About the Outcome

¶12. (C) After congratulating the Rupels for the successful introduction of the Euro, and the surrounding festivities earlier this week, COM asked the Minister about his recent trip to Serbia, noting that he had gotten positive coverage in the Slovenian press for carrying the EU's water on Kosovo. Rupel said that it was interesting that Tadic had refused to see him this time; on his previous trip it had been Kostunica who refused to see him. He said he had appealed once more to Kostunica to understand that the international community would go forward on Kosovo, and that Serbia needed to look to its future in European institutions and NATO. Kostunica thanked Rupel for his support for Serbia's PFP membership. He looked confident, Rupel reported, smiling and talking about the progress Serbia had made in its referendum on the constitution and a "united Serbia," - one still including Kosovo. Rupel said he did not know how to respond, beyond appealing to Kostunica's past leadership as a dissident in preparing Yugoslavia for change. (Note. Rupel mentioned a book that Kostunica and fellow dissident Cavoski had written about political pluralism which had inspired both Serbs and Slovenes in the dissident movement in the eighties. End Note.) Asked about his prognosis for the elections, Rupel admitted he was not sure whether Kostunica, in the end, would, in fact, form a coalition with Tadic. He noted rumors in Serbia that Tadic had talked about offering the PM slot to

the former finance minister in former PM Djindic's government, but only as a first step to ultimately offering it to Kostunica. There was a lot of pre-election dancing around these issues, he said.

¶3. (C) Rupel said that some of the Europeans were concerned that the U.S. did not have the Russians on board on Kosovo and had not been talking to them. COM assured him we had been talking to the Russians, but that the most important thing, in our view, was for the Europeans to support Ahtisaari's plan in full, without delay, which would make it harder for the Russians to make mischief. Rupel mentioned European concern that the Kosovars might get out of hand, but he agreed that this was only one more reason to move smartly forward with Ahtisaari's schedule. As to some European concerns that Kosovo independence would be an uncomfortable precedent for the Russians and others, Rupel agreed that his own speechwriter's (Borut Grgic) recent op-ed on the subject had made clear why Kosovo was a special case.

Italy: A Good Beginning and Some Progress to Report

¶4. (C) Rupel said he had hit it off well with Italian FM D'Alema during his recent visit to Slovenia, taking him to the Goriska Brda wine region where they lunched at the beautiful Movia vineyard. D'Alema, he told COM, was quite a gourmet, having started the Slow Food movement in Italy when he was in the opposition. He even urged Rupel to have an EU ministerial meeting, at some point, at the Movia winery. On substance, Rupel thought they had made some progress. On the issue of the return of paintings and other cultural artifacts

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now held in Italy and removed during WWII from churches now in Slovenian territory, Rupel said the Italians and Slovenians had been working with the Holy See to reach a favorable outcome. He said he expected that the Franciscan order in Italy would return them to the Franciscans in Slovenia some time this year. This had not been an easy issue, since, Rupel reminded COM, these works had been in what was then Italy during the war. It was not legally correct to say they had been removed from Slovenia. Nevertheless, everyone knew this was the right thing to do, and it should proceed. Rupel was critical of Slovenian parliamentarians who had grilled D'Alema on this issue during his visit after both sides had agreed to handle it discreetly through Vatican channels.

Human Rights: Not Getting the Message out on the Erased

¶5. (C) Rupel raised the Human Rights Report, asking who would be writing it. COM explained the process and said that it would be coming out in the next month or so. Discussion turned to the issue of "the erased," citizens who had been removed from the citizenship rolls in the years immediately after Slovenian independence. Rupel said that few people appreciated that over 200,000 non native people, over 10 percent of the population, had been granted citizenship after independence. Of the 18,000 some considered to be "erased," in fact there were no more than 4,000 without legal status. Of these, many were dead or had left the country, although Rupel admitted that he had no idea what the real numbers were, and that the records were very spotty. As to the question about completing a constitutional law to deal with the issue, something directed by the Constitutional Court, Rupel said the government had been pressing the opposition to come to an agreement on the way forward, since such a law would require two-thirds support in the parliament to pass. In fact, the opposition complained that the GOS was pressing too hard on this. Rupel, who had been in the previous government working on this issue, emphasized that there really was no prejudice against ethnic minorities in

Slovenia, and that the issue had been blown out of proportion. COM, referring to recent articles in the Western and internet press, and emphasizing that the erased had taken the issue to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, stressed that the GOS needed to take the issue by the horns, admit the problem, not be defensive, and show it was actively trying to solve it fairly.

.....and Then There are the Roma

16. (C) Rupel defended the GOS record on dealing with the Ambrus Roma family (the Strojans) over the past months, emphasizing their criminal record and hundreds of outstanding complaints against them (pointing out that 3 of the Strojan family had been involved in a rape case for which the court had, without explanation, released them). On a close-hold basis, he mentioned that the head of the police unit had been fired because there had been a move afoot within the police to orchestrate a serious incident with the Roma, where people might actually be killed, to force the fall of the Jansa government. This had fortunately been uncovered and stopped, and PM Jansa at a cabinet meeting had expressed relief that the government had avoided such an incident.

Relations with President Drnovsek Bad

17. (C) Rupel said it was sad that President Drnovsek had embarrassed himself by trying to engage in the Ambrus Roma event, going out by himself with a truck to present containers for living purposes to the family, without informing the police or anyone in the government. (Note: Drnovsek had been stopped and sent back by citizens of Ambrus who were controlling access by road to the site, without succeeding in delivering anything. Rupel assured COM that the individuals who were enforcing their own controls on the road had been dealt with by the police after the fact.) Rupel lamented that Drnovsek had broken off all regular

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contact with the government. In early January, when the MFA had organized its meeting of amassadors, Rupel had sent a personal note to Drnosek, inviting his participation in the meetings n any way he chose. (In the past, the President had hosted a reception for the ambassadors.) Drnovsek had still not responded, and in fact had refused any participation in the meetings. Recently, as Rupel was heading down to Serbia for meetings with Kostunica et al, Rupel had learned that Drnovsek would be giving a press interview that morning on foreign affairs subjects. Rupel had called Drnovsek to make sure he would not say something unfortunate on Serbia or Kosovo that could undermine Rupel's meetings, as had happened once before. Drnovsek refused to take Rupel's call. Over the last year, contacts between Drnovsek and the Jansa government had deteriorated further. Previously, the President, Prime Minister and Rupel would have lunch together every Thursday after the cabinet meeting.

That had not happened for about a year. (Comment: Rupel still maintains a fondness for Drnovsek, and he appears to sincerely regret that relations have deteriorated so seriously. There is no question, however, about whom he blames for this state of affairs. It has become common knowledge that former Foreign Minister, Ivo Vajgl, now senior foreign policy advisor to the President, and Rupel detest each other. While Rupel stayed away from discussing Vajgl, each time Drnovsek's name came up, Rupel's wife, Marjetica, would mention "Rasputin," obviously with Vajgl in mind. End Comment.)

Comment: A Good Week for Rupel

¶8. (C) With the introduction of the Euro this past week, all the VIP visitors to Slovenia, Rupel's trip to Serbia, and D'Alema's visit here earlier this month, Rupel was in good form. To be sure, December saw him under fire when Dnevnik, one of the local papers close to the opposition, ran a front page story several days running on his wife's use of his official car for shopping and other inappropriate uses. There have been other stories suggesting that Rupel is unprepared to lead Slovenia's efforts to chair the EU in ¶2008. Mrs. Rupel was far more downbeat than the minister that these attacks would run right up at least to the Presidential elections this fall and then into the Slovenian Presidency. The good news is that Rupel is still on message on Serbia and Kosovo and appears to be making progress with Italy.

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